

DULUTH AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION MEETING
Monday, February 23, 2009 - 5:00 p.m.
Mayor's Reception Room, 4th Floor, City Hall

Members Present: Michele Gordon; Ricky DeFoe; Warner Wirta; Ron Boshey; Tony LaDeaux; Toni Dickenson; Renee K. Van Nett; (Had to leave early due to an emergency); Dr. Joy Dorscher, had to leave at 6:30 due to other commitments; Bea Kitto arrived at 6:20pm.

Excused Absent: Dr. Robert Powless;

Staff present: Karen Olesen;

Others present: See sign-in sheets.

CALL TO ORDER, APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Meeting called to order by Chair, Ricky DeFoe at 5:05pm. Introductions of Commission members, staff, and community members present.

Motion by Donna Ennis, seconded by Warner Wirta, to approve the agenda. The motion was (unanimously approved).

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE JANUARY 26, 2009 MEETING:

Motion by Donna Ennis, seconded by Michele Gordon, to approve the Duluth American Indian Commission minutes from the January 26, 2009 meeting. The motion was approved. Michele Gordon and Joy Dorscher abstained as they were not at the last meeting.

COMMUNITY PUBLIC FORUM / OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

Report from Brad Clifford on meeting with John Day regarding potential funding sources for the support of the Commission.

Brad Clifford submitted a handout of grant opportunities. Mr. Clifford shared from this handout, possibilities of funding monies available. These are grants that would need to be applied for. Brad Clifford and John Day are meeting, and have invited Sherry Tibbetts to meet with them as well, according to Mr. Clifford, however, she has been unable to do so yet. Their next meeting is at John Day's office at UMD at 10am on Friday the 27th of February. Tony LaDeaux asked if he could attend this meeting as well. He agreed to report back to the commission.

Michele Gordon asked Mr. Clifford for clarity on his statement that his agency, North Star Community Development Corp., could be the fiduciary agent for the commission, but first needed to "clean up his own house/agency" with the IRS. Mr. Clifford did not directly

address this issue, but went on to share about other points on his handout. Tony LaDeaux proposed that an agency, "Anishinabe Oday" could also be the fiduciary agent. Rick DeFoe and Tony LaDeaux are both in this agency. There are other community members involved in this group, Tony LaDeaux said, but he was hesitant to name them since they are not present tonight. Rick DeFoe stated that at this time, these things might be premature, and we should wait to see what the upcoming meeting with John Day shows. Other agencies could look into these grants as well. Tony LaDeaux will report back to the commission at the March meeting.

Jerry Ojibwa was "Here to speak to us about the language of our people". There are three categories of grants in ANA in regard to language; First is Survey and design; second is Implementation, and third is Elders in training with language. Mr. Ojibway shared he is a member of DOLRA, which has been active in Minneapolis the past 4 years. They have been successful in getting ANA grants. He would like to propose to the board that DOLRA come here and share who they are and what they do with the Commission. DOLRA brought issues to the forefront in the state. Political maneuvering needs to happen with a bill regarding this. Amendments to that bill will be added later. DOLRA will be able to give us their history and achievements. Language encompasses so much, including customs and history, Mr. Ojibwa stated. ANA asks that you share everything that you develop with other ANA associates. Contact people are: Betty Jane Shaff-Beck and Margaret Boyer, at 612-721-4246.

Joe Boshey from the community shared regarding housing issues in his life. He has had issues with the HRA in finding public housing. He is homeless, and residing at the Thunderbird Halfway House. He shared the other residents also wanted to be here for this meeting. Joe shared about having criminal background, as do many residents of Thunderbird House. He and others are trying to turn their lives around now. Joe shared that "people want to relocate here". He feels support from all the meetings that are here. Many residents don't want to go back home to their reservations and that environment, and want to relocate in Duluth, with the support. In regard to housing, they are filling out applications and only have 3 months in the halfway house to find their own housing. Many are waiting to hear back after filing these applications. Many go back out on the streets, or with family members, and many return to using chemicals again. Mr. Boshey has felt judged previously when seeking housing and applying for assistance. He has filed an appeal before when turned down. He then felt belittled and talked down to. He felt degraded because of his criminal background. Drinking behavior is not what people would do sober. These residents don't want to be discriminated against in regard to their past behaviors. They want a chance to try to make it, Mr. Boshey said. The halfway house is preparing the residents in how to behave after leaving the program. Mr. Boshey is here for himself and the other residents. He will take things said here back to the other residents. Delaney was here to represent the Wren House as well (halfway house), regarding past criminal records. She shared she has a felony charge on her record from 2003, which will be on her record for the rest of her life. She shared she is alcoholic, and comes from a family and reservation where there is much using. She shared how difficult it is to prove herself to the community with the bad criminal record. She has been homeless since

2003. She has gone through revolving doors of jails and institutions. Delaney wants to remain in Duluth because of the support and the lake and what it means to Ojibwe People. There is history here, she said, and she wants to remain here. She knows she will run into housing barriers again, and this is a struggle for her and other women at the Wren Halfway House.

Ricky DeFoe reminded the two speakers from the halfway house that the halfway house also has a part in not fully doing good discharge planning when not looking at housing issues for clients as they leave the facility, and also that the Duluth Housing Authority is wanting to work on helping the homeless to get housing.

Ron Boshey pointed out discrepancies between what happens to Native American people and “White people” as to issues of housing and in the matter of record in the newspaper. He shared seeing roadblocks in place for Native Americans that are not there for white people. He wishes people could be given a chance to prove themselves in this community. He shared feeling badly for people going through these things. He shared he gets calls all the time from people going through these kind of things, as a commissioner. He wonders about getting a housing sub-committee going to help people.

The HUD definition of homelessness was brought up by a member of the audience as another barrier to getting people off the streets.

OLD BUSINESS:

Establishment of Standing Sub-Committees and Liaison Assignments to Other Community Organizations for 2009

The Civilian Review Board – Tony LaDeaux is sitting on this committee; Ricky DeFoe, Ron Boshey and Donna Ennis are also on the committee. Tony LaDeaux is chair of this sub-committee.

The Lake Superior Barrels Committee – Warner Wirta is chair of this committee; Ricky Defoe and Michele Gordon are also on this committee

Spirit Mountain Sub-committee – Warner Wirta is chair; Toni Dickensen is also on this, as is Ricky Defoe

Housing Committee – Ron Boshey chairs this; Toni Dickensen, Bea Kitto and Donna Ennis members as well.

JDAI group – Donna Ennis is liaison to the group which is facilitated by County Attorney Melanie Ford; Tony LaDeaux also volunteered to attend this group.

Children’s Justice Initiative – we need something from them in writing asking for a board member.

Mental Health/ CD Sub-committee – Michele Gordon, Donna Ennis, with Michele Gordon as chair.

NEW BUSINESS:

Housing Issues – Representatives from the Duluth Housing Authority -

Rick Ball, executive director was present, along with Linda Kaehler, Director of Property Management for public housing, and Pam Benson, Director of the rent subsidy programs. Rick shared it is timely to hear the concerns from community members earlier, and the agency is in the process of reviewing their guidelines in this regard. Policy on criminal background was brought up. Five years beyond the consequence of the crime is required with felonies that are violent or drug-related before someone is eligible for public housing. With the section 8 program, it is one year after the end of consequence to get a rent voucher. Landlords might have a different standard, however, and would adhere to their policy that must be applied equally to all people. It is legal, according to Mr. Grytdahl, to do background checks on applicants. Wes Martin from Indian Legal Aide, also wondered about different rules for Section 8 landlords and the housing authority. He shared he does not understand this. Landlords can do their own screening on eligibility and set their own standards, but these have to be the same for all applicants. HRA does not follow up with the landlords to see if they are discriminating against some people. Discussion was held regarding problems and how HRA would handle these complaints from people.

Bill Morrison asked what HRA is doing to modify any of these restrictions that are on people who have criminal backgrounds. He also asked what HRA is doing to support recovering people in finding housing. He encouraged the HRA to include an alcoholic or felon on their board to begin to understand what this is all about. Mr. Morrison said that this is the 5th commission meeting he has attended and he has not seen the commission do one thing. He challenged the commission to do more, and to get the community here by putting up flyers. He shared he was invited here to speak tonight, so he came. Brad Clifford asked if there are any reports kept about those who are accepted and rejected into housing. Rick Ball says they do not keep these records. Brad Clifford challenged Mr. Ball to do more asking of people, “How can we help you get into housing?” He also challenged HRA to look at how they can reach out to those in halfway house and ask how they can help them get into housing. Ron Boshey shared this is why he wanted to see a housing committee set up by the commission, so he can come and sit at the HRA board meetings, and listen to what is happening. He would be there to answer questions that there might be regarding Native people and housing. Mr. Ball stated people are welcome to attend the HRA Board meetings. They are held the last Tuesday of the month, at 3:30 p.m., in the King Manor building on 2nd Street, in the 2nd floor meeting room. Mr. Ball said it was very positive to have these lines of communication.

Rick DeFoe pointed out the 4 goals of the 10-year Plan to End Homelessness. Rick Ball responded to these goals, and shared the agency is very supportive of these goals. How can we better deliver services is a question they are now looking at, Rick Ball stated. As to

what barriers the Native American people have, Rick Ball stated opening up the lines of communication is a big one, and that tonight has been very helpful, especially with establishing the housing committee here, and listening to one another; becoming a part of the solution. Hearing concerns has been a big barrier. More probationary agreements are being entered into with people. In the past 6 to 8 months there have been changes made, according to the HRA representatives.

Toni Dickensen asked for copy of the policy and procedures of HRA, and Rick Ball said they are available in the HRA office. HRA has worked to allow more probationary leases. Policies are under review right now, so this is a timely discussion.

The appeal process is only a 10 day time frame, and this does not always work well for the mentally ill, or other persons with issues, according to Shaina Connolly of the HDC Homeless Project. HRA representatives say to encourage people to go through the process, as many do give up. Is a 10 day frame reasonable? Perhaps it should be longer, even up to a month, suggested Shaina Connolly.

The HRA also said they support applicants having advocates with them, acting in their behalf. Apply, and follow through with the appeal process, telling one's story is so important. There first appeal is an "informal" appeal to HRA staff. There is also a "formal" third party appeal that can be taken. The HRA abides by the decision of the formal appeal.

Status of the Duluth and St. Louis County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness –

The city works with the county on the homeless plan, and this summer they are working on incorporating the homeless goals into the new Community Development Consolidated 5 Year Plan, according to Karen Olesen. She pointed out that community development has provided monies to the HRA to help with rent vouchers for homeless applicants who can't meet the HRA eligibility rules. It is like Section 8, but has more flexibility, stated Karen Olesen. Char McLennan, the Community Development staff person that works on the homeless plan, will staff the September Commission meeting, and can bring a more detailed report on the 10-Year Plan then.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, UPCOMING EVENTS AND COMMENTS FROM COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Dr. Bob Powless – Of primary note was a letter from Dr. Bob, read by Karen Olesen, stating his resignation from the commission as of today's date. Dr. Bob is dealing with some health issues, and also wishes to do more traveling with his wife. Members reacted with sadness and good wishes for Dr. Bob.

Donna Ennis – On community members who "call us out as to being a dummy board", what is the right response? Donna stated she would not have stayed this long if she thought nothing was happening. Just the fact that we have this board is something, she stated. She shared seeing lots of things getting done.

Warner Wirta – Feels that things are happening with Spirit Mountain and with the barrels of Lake Superior. Gave a document he wrote to the chairs on the status of Spirit Mountain. This document states what Warner would like to see done with Spirit Mountain.

Toni Dickensen – passed.

Ron Boshey – “I’m going to push this housing stuff and push it hard”, he shared. He is going after housing, he shared. And he hopes to make an impact through this Commission. He wants to see policies change and a Native American and African American sitting on their board (HRA). “I’ll talk with the mayor and the city councilors too.” He would also like to see the commission send a thank you letter to ex-Mayor Doty for beginning this Commission.

Tony LaDeaux – Agrees with community member, Bill Morrison, on his views that nothing much has been done by the commission. He shared he is after the “gate-keepers”. He will be providing racism training to the county commissioners. He admitted there are times he has wanted to resign. The victims have been the only thing that has kept him going. We have to continue being cautious. We know what our restrictions are. I learned a lot in Leech Lake, what they did to Indian people as a whole. If somebody wants me to quit, I’ll quit, but I will never stop fighting.

Karen Olesen – asked if anyone was willing to respond to a newspaper person who is writing an article on racism. Tony LaDeaux agreed to do this. Melanie Ford is planning to be here at the March meeting to speak. Officer McGovern could not be here tonight, but works on crime free multi-housing issues. He has met with the person who spoke at the December Commission meeting, and resolved the issues that were brought forward. He will attend the March meeting. Karen Olesen passed out copies of a letter of resignation from Dr. Powless. He will be greatly missed. Donna pointed out Dr. Powless is still willing to consult and advise the Commission if asked, and he offers to do so for free.

Michele Gordon – is doing the Creator’s work everyday, she says. We need to be united around this table and stand firm in what we are doing. We can accept criticism from the public, but we need to support one another. She suggested that the Commission get together as a group and get to know one another, over food and a pipe ceremony.

Rick DeFoe – Each of us is gifted and here for a reason. We can’t please everybody. All Indian leaders have always been criticized, and also when you become clean and sober. Criticism comes from how one uses the language too. What we’re doing is taking the lead. Somebody has to do this, and this is volunteer work. There is a lot of work and a lot of reading that goes into it. There is a lot of passion and care for the people. All of us have this here, or we would not be here. We have to learn to take some of that pain. This will strengthen us as a group here, to get together. Indian people are the strongest people in this country, and we’ve been through a lot. Everyone here is spiritual, and no one is better than the other. This commission provides a unique opportunity.

NEXT MEETING/DATE/LOCATION:

Monday, March 16, 2009 – 5:00 p.m., Mayor's Reception Room, 4th Floor, City Hall

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by Tony LaDeaux, seconded by Ron Boshey, to adjourn the meeting. The motion was (unanimously approved).

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.